

# Rules of the Game

## Polymorphing Revisited (Part Three)

By Skip Williams



In Part One and Part Two, we covered the basic aspects of **alternate form**. When using the alternate form **special quality** in play (or a class feature that's based on alternate form), you'll encounter a few things that the basics don't cover. This week, we'll fill in the gaps.

### Physical Qualities

When a creature assumes a new form through the alternate form special quality, it gains all the miscellaneous physical qualities that a typical specimen of the assumed form would have.

These include all the things (such as **natural armor** and **weapons**) discussed in Part One and Part Two, and also basic things such as the number of and kinds of limbs and appendages the creature has, its height and weight, skin color, hair color, and the like.

When assuming a new form, the creature can freely designate any physical attributes that normally vary between individuals of the assumed form's kind. In most cases, this means the creature can set the assumed form's hair or skin color, eye color, height and weight, and similar, minor, details. The chosen attributes must fall within the normal ranges for a creature of that kind (these will be noted in the creature's description). As a rule of thumb, the assumed form's weight or dimensions can vary up or down by 10% unless a greater variation is allowed among typical specimens. The chosen weight and dimensions, however, cannot change the assumed form's **size** category.

### Racial Traits

Since alternate form doesn't change your type and subtype, it's simplest to rule that you retain any of your racial traits that aren't otherwise barred by the alternate form effect. That means that you'd keep any racial skill **bonuses**, racial bonus feats, and the like, but you wouldn't gain those of the new form. Even though your body appears similar to that of a normal creature of the new form, you don't have its lifetime of experience in the body, and therefore don't necessarily share its natural aptitudes.

### Equipment

When a creature changes form, any equipment it has either remains worn or held by the new form (if that form is capable of wearing or holding the item), or melds into the new form and becomes nonfunctional. The DM must decide if the new form can handle the equipment. This is best decided on a case by case basis; however, *Rules of the Game* has previously suggested that one can divide creatures into types that have basically humanoid shapes and those that do not, as follows:

#### Humanoid Shapes

#### Nonhumanoid Shapes

Fey	Aberration
Giant	Animal
Humanoid	Dragon
Monstrous Humanoid	Elemental
Outsider	Ooze
Vermin	

In this case, "humanoid" refers to a creature that walks upright on two legs, and has two arms, a head, and a torso. A humanoid might have a few extra limbs, such as an extra pair of arms, a pair of wings or a tail (or perhaps wings and a tail). The suggestions presented here are intended as general guidelines only. For example, most outsiders have generally humanoid bodies, but not all of them do. Likewise, some animals have bodies that fit the humanoid plan.

As a rule of thumb, a change from a form that has a humanoid shape to another form that also has a humanoid shape leaves all equipment in place and functioning. The creature's equipment changes to match the assumed form. It becomes the appropriate size for the assumed form and it fits the assumed form at least as well as it fit the original form. The being can change minor details in its equipment, such as color, surface texture, and decoration.

When a subject changes from a form with a humanoid shape to a form with a nonhumanoid shape (or vice versa) most of his equipment is subsumed into the new form and becomes nonfunctional while the creature remains in the assumed form. Items the subject could conceivably wear in an assumed form remain functional. For example, most items worn on the body, such as armor, cloaks, boots, and most other items of clothing made for a humanoid body won't fit on a nonhumanoid body. Some items can fit on just about any kind of body. For example, a ring fits nearly any form that has digits of some kind (the limit of two rings applies no matter how many hands or similar appendages a creature has). Likewise, a necklace fits on just about any form that has a neck.

## Class Features

When a creature assumes an alternate form, it retains any **class levels** it has. As noted in Part One, the creature retains its **hit points**, **alignment**, **base attack bonus**, and **base save bonuses** while in an assumed form. It also retains all its skill ranks and feats, although changes to its **ability scores** might make some feats temporarily unusable. For example, a creature cannot use the Dodge feat if its **Dexterity** score falls below 13.

In spite of what was said in Part One about **extraordinary** special attacks, a creature in an assumed form retains all special attacks and **qualities** derived from class levels. These things are primarily a function of the mind (the creature acquired them through experience and training), and the creature can keep right on using them when in an assumed form.

## What's Next?

That's all the time we have this week. Next week, we'll study a few interactions between alternate form and other magic and will look at an extended example of a creature taking on several different forms.

## About the Author

**Skip Williams** keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of ***Dragon** Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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